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ABSTRACT

This paper describes research strategy for evaluating mother-child intervention programs for black infants in three Chicago low-income housing projects. Mothers were observed with their infants in pre- and post-testing sessions in a room with magazines, children's books, and a television. Analysis of the data is intended to show: (1) the extent to which intervention programs encourage families to change their life styles, (2) the relationship of the mother's personality and self-concept to her overall conception of life in her own family, and (3) the reciprocal relationship already existing between the mother and her 18-24 month-old child before any intervention. There were approximately 40 family participants from each of three housing projects varying greatly in structural arrangements. Two different parent programs, modeled after those of Levenstein and Badger, were used in each housing project. A third group of children at each site served as controls. (BRT)

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MODERNIZATION THROUGH EDUCATION OF MOTHER-CHILD DYADS-

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STRATEGY

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Since 1960, several mother-child intervention programs with low-income black families have been initiated. Almost without exception, they have been characterized by minimal consideration to the existing macroscopic social context which influences the nature of the existing microscopic relationship between these mothers and their children. They have been characterized by the introduction of materials, programmatic strategies, and conceptual orientations which are frequently alien to the communities to which they are brought. The question which interests me, however, is not the question of cultural deficit versus cultural difference. I think that research in child development has been stymied by that particular question for the past five years, if not longer, and it is time to move away from that in considering ethnic minorities in this country.

The situation of the blacks that I study is not one of dramatic cultural difference. Blacks do not live in a separate society. They participate in a society in which many of the dominant forms of value systems, life styles, and means of appropriation of those systems and styles are not of their own making. On the other hand, they, by virtue of the fact that they have been isolated from the mainstream and, consequently, access to those resources and life styles, have developed a separate set of autonomous ways of functioning which meet their needs.

This research starts with the assumption that mothers in these communities have developed a viable way of caring for their children. It starts with the second assumption that anyone who enters such black communities with an early education intervention program immediately presents the problem, for the participants in that program, of assimilation and accommodation in which I am most interested. I am interested, therefore, in the process of childhood socialization

in a context in which families' life styles are being encouraged to change in the direction of a dominant norm.

For example, many, if not most, of the parents value education for their children, but the situations they confront in their communities often do not lend themselves to the realization of many of the desired mechanisms used by the dominant society to enhance and stimulate their children's growth. Hence, I am interested in making an assessment of our participants at the macroscopic level. What are the perceived values of the broader society in this community? What do they think that people usually do? Second, what do they perceive their friends or neighbors doing? Third, what do they prefer for themselves? At this level, I am attempting to assess the value orientations of the participants in our study. This has caused a number of difficulties. Those of you who have had any contact with the socio-psychological literature know that there has been typically little or no attempt to make such an assessment within minority communities, particularly the black community. What indeed do black people believe? What do they want from life? What do they think the essence of human nature is? How do they think children should be handled? These are the kinds of questions I hope I can begin to get some answers to from some of our mothers.

The second level of analysis has to do with the maternal personality. What kinds of things does a mother believe about herself? To what extent does she feel that she has some control over her life, over the life of her child, over the life experiences of those in her family in her community? Where can she draw emotional support, perhaps even financial support, and what benefits does this accrue to the level of her ego development, self-esteem, etc.? What relationship do these aspects of maternal personality bear to her values and overall conceptions about life in her own family?

At the third level, I am interested in the reciprocal relationship which already exists between the mother and her 18-24 month old child who enter the programs, prior to any introduction of intervention. This has meant the following in terms of research design.

First, I have assumed that there is a wide "value stretch" consistent with some of Rodman's (1963) conceptions within any low income black community. I expect that there will be parents whose values and, to the best that they can manage it, life styles approximate the dominant norm. There will be parents at the other extreme whose values and life styles are quite different. How do these parents, when arrayed along that continuum, assimilate and accommodate an introduced intervention experience which primarily is focused toward the norm that I mentioned first? Second, I assume that the necessary control group in such a study would be parents who have no such experience; parents who interact with their children in our situation in ways that they typically would do. I assume that by comparing this group of parents to two other groups of parents who have been exposed to two different intervention strategies that we can begin to learn something about stable interaction patterns between black children and their mothers by comparison to those patterns which emerge when they are presented with a new experience. Third, I assume that it is important to consider the ecological context in which the families actually live, in addition to their own values and life styles as they would prefer them to be. Thus, I see the importance of studying parents who live in low-income housing projects whose structural arrangements vary a great deal. Each of these housing projects is located in the Chicago community.

The first housing project is very similar to a rural kind of environment. It is very remote from the center of the city. The housing facilities themselves are at best two-story; if the parents wish to travel to the center of the city they must make a special effort. The housing project itself was not established for these parents; it was established by nearby industry in the late 1940's in an attempt to provide housing for prospective employees in the neighboring community. Later, when these people had "succeeded", they abandoned these buildings. Our parents and their children now live in them, since the absorption of these buildings by the Chicago Housing Authority. The project serves a population of about 9,645.

The second housing project is approximately sixteen stories high and thirty blocks long. It is located near the heart of the center of the city, and has existed for approximately 10-15 years. During its first few years, no facilities were established for the young children to play; it has only been in recent times that playground facilities, for example, were introduced. This setting can be described euphemistically as a "city within a city". There are enough people living there to support Dr. Garrett's (Dr. Aline Garrett of the University of Southwestern Louisiana, also a panelist) small town--twice! It serves a population of about 26,355.

The third housing project is located even closer to downtown; it also has an interesting history. Unlike the second that I have described which was created specifically for its residents, with the razing of a number of tenement buildings, including anywhere from 30-50 "store front churches", this third housing project was conceived to be one which would be multiethnic, multiracial, and have residents whose incomes would range from low moderate to very low. It seems that the potential occupants, however, did not come to the project in

quite that way. It finally became, over a fifteen year period, a predominantly black project, which is characteristic of the others also. It serves a population of approximately 10,000 persons. It tends to attract, or so it seems to its directors, more recent migrants to the North than the second housing project I described.

There is another source of variation which is important between these three communities: the social service agency (United Charities of Chicago) which delivers the two parent programs is an extremely high quality one which has been delivering services to each of these three housing projects for approximately the past eight years. However, they have been in some longer than in others: the third housing project was entered first, followed by the first and second. The agency was invited to expand services to the latter two projects after preliminary success in delivering services to the initial project.

I think I have described the research design from the perspective of the project as a whole: three levels of assessment; three housing projects; three different programs in each housing project; children between 18-24 months upon entry into the programs being followed for two years, the third group of children receiving no particular early intervention experience. There are approximately 40 program participants at each site, chosen according to the dictates of a sampling plan which covered the entire housing project at each site, for a total N of 120.

In order to study the question of social change in this way, it is important to introduce programs to these communities which have enjoyed success along the criteria of changes in the children's intellectual performance. Indeed, I hope, expect, and anticipate, based upon the preceding research and quality of these programs, that I will find changes in the children's

intellectual performance. In this way, I may be able to begin to study the process of that change as it relates to the interaction between the mother and her child, the mother's conception of herself, and the mother's understanding of the broader community, relative to her value system and life style.

The programs are modelled after two existing parent education programs. One is Phyllis Levenstein's program, widely acknowledged as one of the most distinguished, if not the most distinguished, in the country (Levenstein, 1970, 1971). It is home-based and is one in which mothers are visited twice weekly by Toy Demonstrators. The second program, briefly, is Earladeen Badger's program (Badger, 168, 1971) which enjoys the reputation of being perhaps the only parent group program in the country which has successfully sustained and held parents from a similar community over a two-year period such that, at its conclusion, it also reported successful child performance outcomes.

In the two minutes which remain, I would like to review what I have said from another perspective. I had the opportunity to receive some informal critiques early on in our research, and they astounded me as to the level of confusion about what I was doing.

First it was thought, and I hope that I have dispelled that notion, that I was dealing with a deficit-difference issue. I am not dealing with that; I am interested in the relationship between normative behaviors, values, and intervention.

Second it was thought that I basically need not be interested in the service delivery component. In short, why not just do a developmental study? I consider the service delivery component of this study both integral and essential. There are many suggestions from the developmental research literature

of mutually reciprocal influence patterns between mothers and their children. It is also known that there are social class differences in parenting styles, and that there is some overlap between classes as regards these styles. Unfortunately, although there is now some informal data available (primarily through the Parent Child Development Centers established by the Office of Child Development in New Orleans, Birmingham, and Houston), there is little information as to whether in fact changes in children in low income communities are associated with changes in their mothers.

Third, it was questioned as to why bother--why do this study of parent education per se? I think it is important to point out that I am not interested in who is the most effective teacher of the child; I have chosen my control group as one representative of stable patterns of interaction between mothers and children because I am interested in what the usual modes of caregiving are, at least so far as maternal socialization practices are concerned.

Let me briefly go over what some of the methodological problems confronted by our investigative team have been in regard to the observational study of these mothers and their children. We could find no models in the literature to do what we wanted to do with our mothers. We wanted to set a baseline on the mothers; we wanted to do it in a way that seemed to us related to how mothers actually teach their children. Therefore, we have presented our mothers with no task in our twenty-five minute observation session (a pre- and post-observation is planned), which we conduct on the site at each housing project in order to maximize the mothers' feelings of comfort and ease relative to this kind of experience. We have simply asked mothers to "be themselves", insofar as that is possible with a Jet magazine, an Ebony magazine, two or three children's books, each of which we bought for a dollar, and a TV set.

We also provide a few toys placed in the center of the living room with which child and/or mother might decide to play. I want to say that we get wide ranges in this community of mothers "being themselves." Some mothers spend the first five minutes getting their child to do something so they can turn on the TV. There are other mothers, at the other extreme, who get right in and start "doing their thing" with their child, such that it is as if the child would like to say, "Would you just get back and let me do my thing!" In between these extremes there are also mothers like John Dill's fathers (Dr. John Dill, City College of New York, also a panelist in this symposium), in and out vis-a-vis their children's play.

The point is, however, that in this kind of unstructured, as close to ecologically valid, observation session as we can get with mothers of these young children, we find wide variation in how they relate to their children. I think this is the kind of setting that researchers need to create more often in order to understand the development of the black child.

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